DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 082 317 EA 005 424

AUTHOR Hollis, Coy F.
TITLE Perceptions of School Board Members and School System Personnel Concerning Role Responsibility in Initiating Solutions to Educational Problems.
PUB DATE Nov 72
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at Mid-South Educational Research Association Annual Meeting (1st, New Orleans, Louisiana, November 9-11, 1972)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Responsibility; Administrator Role; Board of Education Role; Decision Making; Educational Administration; *Educational Problems; *Leadership Responsibility; *Problem Solving; *Role Perception; Superintendent Role; Teacher Responsibility; Teacher Role

ABSTRACT

This study was an attempt to describe the relationship between the type of position a person holds in a school system and his perception of role responsibility in initiating action to solve the educational problems of the system. The perception of board members, superintendents, principals, and teachers was compared. The board members, designated as the formal leaders of the group, were asked to state the tasks that must be performed to solve the problems of a school system. Each person was asked to indicate who among the group was responsible for performing the designated task. Findings indicate that (1) there is widespread disagreement among school system personnel concerning role responsibility; (2) superintendents are expected to be the prime movers in initiating solutions to educational problems; (3) there is great disagreement between board members themselves and between board members and the rest of the group concerning their own role; (4) teachers are the forgotten members in the problemsolving operation of a school system; (5) principals and teachers disagree on the proper role of superintendents and board members; and (6) differences of opinion among board members concerning their own role were evident in such areas as functions of the local schools, improving instructional material, and fiscal control. (Author)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED 082317

PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS AND SCHOOL SYSTEM PERSONNEL CONCERNING ROLE RESPONSIBILITY IN INITIATING SOLUTIONS TO EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS

A Paper Presented at the

Mid-South Educational Research Association

First Annual Meeting

New Orleans

November 9-11, 1972

By

Coy F. Hollis, Director
Extended Services and Institutional Research
The University of Tennessee at Martin
Martin, Tennessee 38237

EA 005 424

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Coy F. Hollis

TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER."

FILMED FROM BEST AVAILABLE COPY

PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS AND SCHOOL SYSTEM PERSONNEL CONCERNING ROLE RESPONSIBILITY IN INITIATING SOLUTIONS TO EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS

Probably everyone has been given an assignment and thought, "why me?" At a time like that, you begin to recount in your mind all the other offices and persons to whom it would be more appropriate to assign such a task. There is likely to follow a verbal barrage that includes an indictment against the intelligence of your superiors, remorse over the fact that your fellow workers--those not assigned the task--get all the breaks, and self-sympathy because you get all the dirty work.

If, however, you can eliminate the variables of chance and personality and assume that the assignment was given to you as a result of the position you hold, then the question, "why me?" could be stated positively as: "This is not my responsibility and the assignment should be given to someone else." The implication of this statement is that there is a disparity between organizational responsibility and task assignment. Or stated more succinctly, "why me?"

In general, this paper is an attempt to describe the organizational relationships and the perception of task responsibilities among school system personnel. More specifically, it will focus upon perception of responsibility associated with particular roles and upon the responsibility for initiating action in problem-solving as opposed to the entire problem-solving process.

When looked at from an organizational point of view, the lines of authority in a typical school system can be drawn quite clearly. The line begins, at the local level, with a board of education, then the superintendent and his staff, next the principals of the local schools and last the teachers.

However, when viewed from a functional point of view, the relationship of these roles to each other vis-a-vis the problems to be solved in the operation of a school system becomes less clear.

The issue at question is: "What is the perceived relationship between a person's role in a school system and his responsibility for initiating solutions to the educational problems of the system." A word of explanation must be given at this point concerning the distinction between the meaning of "initiating solutions to educational problems" and "solving educational problems." "Solving problems" ususally has to do with a span of activities beginning with the recognition of the problem, steps taken to solve it, and the results obtained. "Initiating solutions" is concerned only with who should take the first step in setting the problem-solving process into motion. Problem-solving in an organization as complex as a school system has broad implications and is indicative of synergy among many persons in the organization and the responsibility of a single person can become lost as his efforts blend into the whole process.

Since the focal point of the study was upon the individuals involved and their distinct responsibilities, it was necessary to look at some part of the process where the individual could be expected to act and his action be distinct from the group effort. The place where individual action could most easily be distinguished was in the initiating phase of the activity. For while an individual may not be able to solve a problem by himself, he could, as an individual, initiate the problem-solving process.

In order to investigate this problem, it was first necessary to establish a theoretical framework to support the approach taken in this study. Two limitations must be stated with regard to this theoretical structure. First, it does not represent an attempt to develop a theory of administration. Second,

it is not intended that hypothetico--deductive relationships be stated and attempts be made to prove or disprove them.

The paradigm thus developed was only intended as a means of describing the organizational structure of a school system which was conceived to consist of four elements: 1) purpose, 2) personnel, 3) role responsibility, and 4) a leader(s). The description and rationale of the paradigm is as follows.

The first element, purpose, defines an organization's reason for being. Stated in its most generalized form, the purpose of a school system is to provide a quality educational program. The fulfillment of this general purpose, however, has many inplications and must be broken down into measurable objectives and specific tasks. The accomplishment of these specified tasks may be characterized as meeting the "educational needs" of the system. Conversely, educational needs are a delineation of the tasks which must be carried out. While purpose remains relatively constant over a period of time, tasks may change through time as educational needs change. Thus, tasks are delineated within time intervals with reference to educational needs.

The second element, personnel, refers to those persons charged with the responsibility of carrying out the tasks of the system. The personnel with which this study was concerned fall into one of four categories: board members, superintendents, principals, and teachers. The inclusion of these particular members and consequent exclusion of others, e.g., members of the county court, city officials, and maintenance and service personnel was not intended to diminish or ignore the role of those not included. Those included in the study were chosen because their role was more closely associated with the execution of the educational program of a school system. The various tasks which must be performed were commensurate with the expected behavior of the members of this group.

The third element of the paradigm was role responsibility. It would be a serious violation of organizational theory to structure an organization in such a way that certain tasks lay outside the duties of the personnel. Stated more briefly, someone must be responsible for each task. Everything that happens in a school system must be the responsibility of someone within the system.

Further, it is not only expected that the combined responsibility of the members of an organization will cover all exigencies, but that there will not be a great deal of overlap in their responsibility. The role filled by each member requires that their expected behaviors be differentiated, i.e., each member of the group will not be expected to be involved in every task of the organization, only those appropriate to his area of responsibility.

The fourth element is a leader or leaders. The leader or chief executive is charged with responsiblity for the successful functioning of the organization and it thus becomes his responsibility to establish reporting channels, stipulate limits of authority and responsibility and define the goals of the organization. While there is a lack of consensus concerning the proper role of board members, in this study they were designated as the formal leaders and as such were responsible for establishing the tasks of the school system.

In summary, the paradigm employed to describe the organizational structure of a school system consisted of four elements.

1) Purpose--which must be stated as specific tasks to be performed;
2) Personnel--the persons responsible for carrying out the tasks of the organization;
3) Role responsibility--the relationship of the personnel based on a job description of duties to be performed; and,
4) Leader(s)--the one(s) responsible for specifying the tasks to be performed.

In order to determine how school system personnel perceived responsibility for initiating solutions to educational problems, several steps were taken. Board members were asked to state educational needs or problems. This was tantamount to specifying tasks to be performed. The statements of need, or the tasks, were written in the idiom of the board members and were original with each one, i.e., they were not asked to select needs from a pre-established list, but to generate a list of needs as they perceived them. There was, of course, some duplication of content. In order to eliminate duplication, yet retain the essence of the statements, a panel of experts was used to sort and reduce the number of items to a manageable size. The statements were sorted into genenic clusters, i.e., statements of similar kind were grouped together. Forty-two groups resulted from the sorting. For each group, a rubric, i.e., an editorial interpolation, was written. These statements became the instrument to which the members of the group responded. Each of those participating was asked to mark the person they thought to be responsible for initiating a solution to the problem indicated in each statement.

The responses to these statements were used to test the following null hypothesis: "There is no significant difference among members of local boards of education, superintendents, principals and teachers in their perception of role responsibility in initiating solutions to educational problems." The data were analyzed by use of two statistical techniques: 1) the chi-square test of significance, and 2) a Goodman-Kruskol lambda--an index of predictive association.

An analysis of the data indicated that the members of the group differed significantly on 27 of the 42 items. In other words they disagreed 65% of the time and only agreed 35% of the time on who was responsible for initiating

solutions to problems. The findings are strongly indicative of a state of confusion concerning role responsibility. Disagreement of this magnitude is certainly an indication of organizational dysfunction.

Based upon the analysis of the data, the following observations are offered:

1) It was clear that the superintendent is expected to be the prime mover in initiating solutions to educational problems. He was selected more often than any other role, being chosen over 50% of the time by all group members combined. This strongly suggests that school personnel perceive problem solution to be a function of authority rather than expertise. This is not to imply that superintendents lack expertise, but it is questionable that they have more than those in all other groups combined. It also clearly reflects a mind-set conditioned to the functions of a hierarchical structure, i.e., decisions and actions originate at the top and flow or are forced down.

2) There was more disagreement between board members and the rest of the group concerning the board member's own role than between any other single role and the rest of the group. Board members claimed responsibility 32% of the time but were only assigned responsibility 21% of the time. The items on which there was greatest difference concerned functional matters, rather than policy decisions. The response patterns reflected a tendency on the part of board members to assume more responsibility for the operational aspects of a school system than the school system personnel were willing to assign to them. Board members who insist upon involvement in operational activities could thus be characterized as over-participators in the educational process.

3) Teachers are the forgotten members in the problem-solving operation of a school system. They were assigned less responsibility than any other role by

every group--other than their own. They are particularly forgotten by superintendents. In fact, on 18 of the 42 items, superintendents did not assign any responsibility at all to teachers and did not assign them major responsibility on any item. It was interesting to note, however, that on 32 of the 42 items, or 76%, teachers assigned themselves more responsibility than any other group member assigned them. This may be indicative of a willingness to serve which lacks ample opportunity to express itself.

4) There was a very distinct difference between personnel at the local school level, i.e., between principals and teachers, concerning the role of board members and superintendent. Principals assigned more responsibility to superintendents than board members, while teachers assigned more responsibility to board members than superintendents. The meaning of this is uncertain, unless it is related to the fact that principals report directly to the superintendent and have been conditioned in this pattern, while teachers being a step removed have wider latitude in exercising their discretion. If this assumption is true, it has the very definite implication that influence in a hierarchical organization is a function of the reporting channel and that influence is directly proportional to distance in the structure of the organization, i.e., the farther away the less the influence. Therefore, if you wish to influence someone, keep them close at hand.

Board members were the leaders or chief executives and their perceptions were studied in more depth. Three additional hypothesis were tested. In essence these stated that:

1) There is no difference in the perception of board members of "high" and "low" involvement in school matters. The criteria used in determining high and low were: a) number of hours per week required to do school board work; b)

number of board meetings attended per year, and c) number of visits made to schools per year, not counting board meetings.

2) There is no difference in the perception of board members of "long" and "short" tenure. Length of service was reported and the group was divided along the median to determine long and short tenure.

3) There is no difference in the perception of members of county and city boards of education.

Board members did not differ in their perception among themselves as much as the other groups, but there are some noteworthy examples. Those classified as high and low in involvement disagreed on seven of the 42 items, and all of them had to do with the program of the local school. In every case those classified as high in involvement wanted to participate more in the affairs and functions of the local schools.

Board members classified according to tenure disagreed on only one item, but it was a sizeable disagreement. This item concerned improving the quality of instructional material and the chi-square value was significant at the .001 level. The difference was the result of the fact that board members of short tenure assigned major responsibility to the superintendent while those of long tenure assigned major responsibility to the teachers. The implication is that the longer a person is on the board, the more he holds local school personnel responsible for improving the quality of instructional material.

Members of county and city boards disagreed on only four items. These were, in the main, items concerning the management of fiscal affairs. The county members exhibited a much more "tight-fisted" attitude, hardly allowing any involvement at the local school level. Members of the cities' boards maintained fiscal control but were willing to allow participation in fiscal matters at the local school level.

In summary, if the personnel are to initiate the activities that will fulfill the purpose of an organization, it is necessary that they have a clear perception of who is responsible for performing the various tasks. Clarity of perception is necessitated by the structural requirement of an organization that each person be responsible for certain tasks, but not all tasks. Perception of responsibility is the sine qua non of organizational efficiency. The natural consequence of the lack of a clear conception of responsibility is the lack of action or a conflict over duties. This is especially true when problems arise outside of, or between, clearly established lines of responsibilities. The stalemate is echoed in the words, "Somebody ought to do something about that--but why me?"

SOLUTION INITIATOR SCALE

Coy Hollis
Copyright 1971

Memphis State University
Bureau of Educational Research

Unmet educational needs result in problems. Problems that arise in a school system are related to the area of responsibility of one of four persons: (1) board member, (2) superintendent or staff member, (3) principal or his administrative staff member, or (4) teacher, including counselors, coaches, etc. Each of these persons should take the lead in initiating action that will lead to solutions of the problems that arise in his area of responsibility. **Initiating** action, as used here, is not the same as **solving** the problem, and the term "initiate action" does not necessarily mean "official action." Instead, it means that when a person becomes aware of a problem he attempts to do something about it. Solving a problem may involve several persons, agencies or institutions – even some from outside the school system; however, a person within the system must assume responsibility for initiating action. This scale may be used to indicate the person whom you think is responsible for initiating action to deal with the problem of meeting each of the needs stated in items 1-42.
(NOTE: The emphasis is on initiating action, not on solving the problem.)

EXAMPLE

Educational Needs	B	S	P	T
Improvement in student-teacher relations			X*	
Preparation of a policy manual for the school district	X*			
Establishment of training programs for staff members		X*		
Informing parents about a pupil's learning problems				X*

*The marks indicate the person whom the respondent thinks is responsible for initiating action to deal with each of these needs.

MARKING THE SCALE

The person that should initiate action is:

B - Board member

S - Superintendent or staff member

P - Principal or his staff members

T - Teacher, etc.

EDUCATIONAL NEEDS		B	S	P	T
1. Additional school facilities to reduce overcrowding.	1				
2. Reduction of students' extra-curricular activities.	2				
3. A greater variety of vocational-technical programs.	3				
4. More effective use of federal funds.	4				
5. Merger of small school systems.	5				
6. Improvement of school-community relations.	6				
7. Buildings designed to better serve teaching and learning goals.	7				
8. Reduction in the dropout rate.	8				
9. Increased funds for textbooks, instructional materials, and supplies.	9				
10. Reduction in the causes of student unrest.	10				
11. Improved quality of instructional materials.	11				
12. Additional school personnel (for example, teacher aides and secretaries) for non-instructional responsibilities.	12				
13. Expansion of counseling services to include the elementary grades.	13				
14. Provision for the curricular needs of special education students.	14				

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Coy F. Hollis
TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER"

(Continued on back)

EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

		B	S	P	T
15.	Establishment of orientation programs that will assist school board members in understanding and performing their responsibilities.	15				
16	Enlargement of curriculum content to include additional courses in art, music, and foreign languages.	16				
17	Removal of partisan, political influence on the office of the local school superintendent.	17				
18.	Preparation of more teachers for special education classes.	18				
19.	Improvement in the competency of school administrators in business and personnel administration.	19				
20.	Adaptation of instructional content and methods to meet the needs of disadvantaged students.	20				
21.	More efficiency and safety in transporting children.	21				
22.	Improvement in teaching methods.	22				
23.	Increased involvement of parents in the education of their children.	23				
24.	Establishment of state-supported kindergartens.	24				
25.	Assignment of teachers to teach only those subjects for which they are certified.	25				
26.	Remedial programs for students who are underachievers.	26				
27.	Consolidation of small schools.	27				
28.	Higher salaries for teachers.	28				
29.	Improvement in the evaluation of local school programs.	29				
30.	Improvement of reading instruction at all levels.	30				
31.	Increased emphasis on vocational-technical guidance.	31				
32.	Improvement of local in-service programs for teachers.	32				
33.	A pupil-teacher ratio that will promote the most effective learning.	33				
34.	Clarification of instructional objectives.	34				
35.	Revision of the local tax structure for financing education.	35				
36.	Improvement in teacher evaluation procedures.	36				
37.	Improvement in school property maintenance procedures.	37				
38.	Psychological services (for example, testing, diagnostic evaluation, and counseling) at all grade levels.	38				
39.	Improvement of teacher training programs in colleges and universities.	39				
40.	Provision for educational opportunities for persons beyond school age.	40				
41.	Use of alternatives (for example, large and small groups, non-graded grouping, and multi-age grouping) to the current instructional organization.	41				
42.	Establishment and enforcement of policies governing school attendance zones.	42				